INTRODUCTION

Motivation can be derived from various things as shown in patterns of history. Generations tend to adapt to trends in which their everyday lives are influenced by. One hundred years ago, citizens of the U.S. were motivated to find work and provide for their families. Now days, people have focused their motivation on other aspects of life. Over the years, extensive research has provided us with knowledge on the health of our bodies. Body composition is one of the hottest topics of this decade. People are constantly sharing news on healthy foods and proper exercise in order to reach a body composition goal. Perhaps the largest source of this topic is rooted from social media. Fitness and health related social media accounts stress the importance of a healthy lifestyle. People from all over the world share this type of information and it influences individual to improve their healthcare. Social media networks such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook deliver motivation to many aspects of your news feed to assure people are aware of health and fitness benefits. Knowing this brings up the question: to what extent are people motivated to be healthy by social media? To be even more specific, we have targeted a group of people who are very active social media users: college students. College students often are busy on their phones throughout the day. Speaking for the majority, they are on their phones to check out social media. Social media causes these students to share information whether it is verbally or through their accounts. The hype of this motivation is an interesting concept to tune in on. It is through communication that we are able to pass on the influential concepts of health and fitness to college students. Our prior knowledge on this topic comes from personal experiences we’ve had on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. We follow fitness and motivation accounts that offer ideas to mix up foods, workouts and detailed information on body composition. On a daily basis, we come across information that influences us to have a healthier lifestyle. When we become lazy, these accounts remind us to keep at our goals. Multiple times a week we tag each other on a post that offers useful information on diet and exercise. This form of communication explains the hype of the decade behind the talk of this topic, especially for this generation. This generation is constantly on phones and social media, which is why communicating through social media is a critical resource for delivering information. With all of the research done on how a healthy lifestyle affects you throughout your lifespan, this is an extremely important topic to be aware of. Social media has an impact on the knowledge college students have on proper diet and exercise. The communication factor of it is the future of generations.

(Section One)

Similar research has been conducted on this topic, which provides us with more accurate information to study. Multiple secondary sources and three scholarly articles have been screened that have a relation to health and fitness through social media communication. These sources allow us to present the best possible results along with the data we have conducted on our own. The sources found most relevant to our topic, discuss how media portrays male and female bodies. Out of all these sources we have broken down the way social media affects college students into two categories: self-esteem and health and fitness.

Self-esteem: How can social media affect self-esteem? There are multiple ways social media can affect self-esteem, some positively, and some negatively. In the secondary sources we have chosen we mainly see how social media decreases self-esteem. In todays world a good amount of amusement comes from social media, whether it’s catching up with an old friend from high school on Facebook or watching a motivational workout video on Instagram. Since there is so much time spent on social media there have been multiple experiments and studies as to how people are affected by them. A study done by the University of Pittsburgh and the Columbia Business School found that: “positive comments on social media can and do boost self-esteem and thus, influence user behavior”. (Soltero) It seems obvious that positive comments would boost your self-esteem, but nowadays it’s not just about one positive comment. It’s merely a contest between how many comments, followers, or likes one can get in order to feel worthy. “Without a lot of “likes,” followers, or retweets, teens see themselves as not good enough”. (Raney) Self worth is being measured by social media popularity and if you don’t meet as high of standards as expected then it can be discouraging. In some cases it is possible to buy followers or likes for your twitter and instagram accounts in order to portray the idea that you are “popular” on social media.

This brings up the topic of famous social media accounts. When looking at famous social media accounts the users are usually rich, personal trainers, or live unrealistic lifestyles. These famous accounts are known for posting pictures of beautiful women, perfectly shaped bodies and amazing surroundings. When people view these accounts it can be discouraging to think that their body can never be that perfect or they will never be able to get over 2,000 likes on a picture. It gives people a false sense of reality and puts in image in their head that if they don’t look like models then they aren’t good enough for society. On the other hand these accounts can do the exact opposite and motivate users to attempt to be like that famous account. On successful personal trainers social media accounts they have tips on how to workout, eat healthy and live their lifestyle.

Health and Fitness: Everybody wants to have a perfectly shaped body and for some, that’s a possibility, but for a lot of people it is not very likely. Social media has the power to motivate and educate people on health and fitness through communication, which gives them tools to be the best they can be if utilized. An example of social media helping motivate someone was shown in the article “The Power of Social Media to Affect Our Health and Fitness” where we hear a quick story from Tara Sabo. She explains how she ran in the Chicago Women’s Half Marathon and just weeks before the race she saw a picture of the medals the winners would get on a Facebook post. Her seeing this picture and reading the comments of fellow competitors motivated her to train harder and become even more excited for the event. There are plenty of accounts on all social media platforms that motivate people by posting pictures of healthy meals, workouts, and transformation pictures. Something to consider when looking at these accounts is their credibility because there are no regulations on what people can post as far as health and fitness information. Information can be misleading but most of the famous accounts that are dishing out helpful information are certified personal trainers or certified dietitians. With this in mind there are accounts discouraging health and fitness like McDonalds and Taco Bell who have millions of followers that are being subject to advertisements.

SECTION TWO: PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

For our primary research we wanted to use three different methods to go about gathering our information and really grasp the most beneficial data. Our primary research consists of a survey, interviews, and social media. Through our first primary research method, a survey, we were hoping to find out how relevant social media is in peoples lives as well as how much it correlates to their motivation towards health and diet. We asked simple questions looking for simple answers that will eventually turn out to be crucial data for our research. We sent a mass e-mail of our survey out to our business fraternity in hopes of getting a couple responses as well as sending e-mails to our close friends. Surprisingly we got a respectable 60 responses with a wide variety of answers. Sending this survey to peers is beneficial because we are focusing on how social media affects college students. In our second method for primary research we are interviewing a close friend who is in the process of attaining his doctorate in exercise physiology. Here we are looking to get a different insight on social media in the eyes of a professional. Of course this close friend is going to have a different perception of social media and how it affects him but we are curious to see the similarities he has with our peers. With his knowledge he may find misleading information that the generation following these fitness accounts might have missed, based on the fact that most of our peers are not as highly educated on the subject of health and fitness. Thirdly we are going straight to the source of social media looking at comments, likes, followers, and etc. on different apps like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube.com. Going directly to these social media accounts will hopefully exploit what people think of the accounts and how they communicate through them. We wanted to use this method because personally we know what it’s like to follow these accounts but we never really take the time to read comments or pay attention as to how other people view the accounts.

SECTION THREE:

With the research that has already been done and we have conducted, a pattern has come to our attention. Studies show that social media communicates to viewer’s diet and fitness. There is sufficient evidence that supports this idea in many forms of proper exercise. In the article The Power of Social Media to Affect Our Health and Fitness, Tara Sabo shares a story in which she was influenced to run a marathon. Sabo noticed a post of a metal by the organizer of the race, which communicated to her motivation to sign up to compete. “Had I not followed them on Facebook, I might not have seen that image ahead of time. I certainly wouldn’t have been able to read the comments posted by the women that would ultimately be running alongside me. Talk about motivation” (Sabo). Sabo admitted that the posts on Facebook directly motivated her to run. The idea of exercise was communicated to her through Facebook. This example serves as proof that people are indeed influenced by posts on social media. Because Sabo saw the post of a metal from a past race, she decided to work on her fitness by running a marathon. If it weren’t for seeing the Facebook post, Sabo noted that she would probably not have even known about the event. Facebook communicated to Sabo and motivated her to be active. This is one of the many cases found where a social media post directly influences individuals to get exercise.

Along with exercise, studies show social we are influenced to form a better diet by social media. A proper diet can prevent harmful diseases such as diabetes. “The benefits of social media in health care are obvious in that, first, they provide a means for capturing alternative views, personal experiences and tacit knowledge on diagnoses and treatments that are unlikely to be obtained from official information resources” (Anderson and Speed). This supports the idea that we are communicated to eat healthy because of what we see on social media. Posts contribute to our daily health habits, which can be a good or bad thing. The news feed is exposed to all of us and it will have an effect on the decisions you make.

Social media does not only portray good eating habits, but advertisements of fast food chain restaurants on social media sites have an impact on our diet.

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| **Brand** | **Number of Facebook "likes"** | **Number of posts** | **Number of "likes" on posts** | **Number of comments on posts** | **Number of posts shared** | **Total Facebook engagement** |
| **McDonald's** | 51,037,243 | 22 | 381,488 | 37,726 | 32,756 | **451,970** |
| **Subway** | 27,614,422 | 29 | 945,038 | 12,454 | 14,781 | **972,273** |
| **Taco Bell** | 10,637,966 | 12 | 80,264 | 6,343 | 16,488 | **103,095** |

(Johnson, Lauren)

The figure above displays three of the largest fast food chain restaurants in the world and their popularity on Facebook. These accounts receive millions of likes on the unhealthy food they are promoting. People crave fast food to the extent that they actually engage in the social media activity. Of course, as supported, this exposure has an impact on our diets. Every time an individual comes across an advertisement, a thought pops into their head. Whether it is a good or bad thought about the company who advertised it, all publicity is good publicity. This common saying supports the idea that exposure on social media has an effect on your diet. Both good and bad diets are communicated to individuals wherever seen throughout social media. In the case of the fast food restaurants on Facebook, poor diet is communicated. This example counter argues the statement: Social media influences people to eat healthy.

Since social media does not communicate only healthy diets, are there both positive and negative effects on exercise? This question brings up an idea relating to self-image and self-esteem. Social media has a significant impact on our self-esteem. As seen more and more, younger generations live through their phones. This means that a great deal of news, information, politics, etc. is communicated through social media. Younger generations are so into this information that it effects how worthy they feel. “Without a lot of ‘likes,’ followers, or retweets, teens see themselves as ‘not good enough’” (Raney, Hayley). People care about this popularity so much that there are actual companies that offer likes and followers. Hypez.com is one of these companies that sell packages of 2500 likes for $29.99, 5000 likes for $39.99 and the Diamond package of 10,000 likes for $69.99. People purchase these to feel better about themselves and provide a more popular image. Since we care about this so much, we have come to let it determine our self-esteem. This, of course, is unhealthy to our body and mind. If an individual is unpopular on social media, they can become discouraged. This form of discouragement may be reversed and encourage individuals to improve their lifestyle to not only become more popular on social media, but feel better about themselves. “Social media can affect a teen’s self-esteem by changing their entire style such as clothes, music, and personality and even change what kind of friends they have” (Raney). This may occur as a poor way of dealing with the situation, but there are positives that come along with it. When an individual is “not popular” on social media, they search for a change in their lifestyle, as Raney states. Many times have people felt the need to change their lifestyle by improving their diet and fitness. Sofia Fernandez’s abstract states “over the past several years, women have shown an increase in body dissatisfaction” (Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky, & Perry). The bar is being set higher for the expectations of how women should look. The drive for thinness is often expressed through social media, which can motivate individuals to eat properly and exercise regularly. This idea opens the door to becoming more popular on social media by posting progress pictures that viewers tend to enjoy. The instagram account, @ig\_weightloss, is a popular account with 2.1 million followers. This account receives millions of weight loss progress pictures sent in by motivated individuals in hope that their picture will be posted by the popular account. This account also provides its followers with healthy recipes and videos of exercises. People look up to these accounts and are influenced by them to have an outstanding progress picture of their own. Our good friend from home has recently contributed to this activity by losing forty-seven pounds in just five months. He posted a before-and-after picture on Instagram that received over one hundred more likes than his average post. This supports the idea that your social media popularity can indeed be increased through health and fitness. Social media exposes posts that communicate to us diet, whether good or bad, and exercise.

Social media offers more influential information similar to the idea of how before-and-after pictures motivate people. Health.com provides a list of suggested fitness trainers to follow on Instagram. This is just one more way of communicating an opportunity to viewers to get into a healthy lifestyle. Sanghee Oh and Soojung Kim conducted research to understand how college students use social media for health information. From a survey of 342 college students, they came to a conclusion: “The findings of this study suggest the potential of social media as a desired health-promotion channel for college students” (Oh and Kim). Research proves that social media is used by college students to become informed on health.

To support this idea that social media influences are diet and fitness even more, we have conducted a survey to see how interactive college students are in this relationship. Our survey questioned the ages of 18-23 regarding the amount of social media use, followed health and fitness accounts and the amount of influence it has on their health and fitness lifestyle. 77% of respondents answered to following a fitness related account. This information reveals that most people who are following a type of health account are following one that deals with motivation to exercise. The next question was: to what extent do these accounts influence your healthcare lifestyle? A mix response consisted of 12.96% answering none, 24.07% answering a little, 31.48% answering some, 27.78% answering quite a bit and 3.7% answering a lot. This information tells us that the accounts do have some effect on the majority of college students, but it varies on the amount. Some feel that it really motivates them and others feel it has a little or no influence. When questioned: on a scale 1-5 (5 being the most), how much do these accounts influence you to exercise? Results were spread out as 21.43% answered 1, 21.43% answered 2, 25% answered 3, 21.43% answered 4 and 10,71% answered 5. This tells us that even though the majority of our respondents answered to following a fitness related social media account, the amount it actually influences them to exercise depends on the person, as it varies. The final question of our survey asked: how much do these accounts influence you to eat healthy? 16.07% answered 1, 23.21% answered 2, 26.79% answered 3, 32.14% answered 4 and 1.79% answered 5. These results indicated that college students are fairly motivated to eat healthy by the healthcare accounts. Even though these students follow mainly fitness accounts, perhaps this is used as motivation to be overall healthy, which influences them to eat healthy instead of exercising.

Overall, there is sufficient evidence supporting the idea the social media has an effect on college students in terms of self-image and healthcare. In the example of Sabo, a Facebook post caused her to compete in a marathon and become active. Social media has been proven to promote a healthy lifestyle, but it does have some setbacks due to advertisements. As seen, fast food restaurants post pictures that millions of people like and are exposed to, which can lead to poor eating habits. On the other side of things, we can be motivated to reach our goals when coming across a motivational post such as before-and-after pictures. These improve self-esteem as well as taking health precautions on your body. As popularity plays a large role on the impact of this generation, people can be motivated to share their improvements with their followers in hopes of receiving likes and follows that will boost self-esteem. Many accounts offer health and fitness information that influence college students to eat healthy and exercise. Results from our survey show that students follow mostly fitness related accounts, but are more influenced to eat healthy than to actually exercise. Either way, they are being influenced to improve their overall healthcare lifestyle.

CONCLUSION:

After interpreting sources and research on similar topics as well as conducting a topic specified survey, we have collected enough information to support our argument. It appears that social media has a large impact on our lives in terms of: self-image, self-esteem, diet and fitness. Ideas are promoted through social media that communicates to us in an influential way. Past research on this topic states that we are being influenced to eat whatever food we are exposed to when coming across dietary related posts. This can be healthy or unhealthy, whichever is being promoted. It also supports the idea that we exercise more when coming across fitness motivation posts. Thus far, nothing has been discovered to say we exercise less when coming across these types of posts. Many individual’s self-image is depicted by what is communicated through social media. This may cause people to become discouraged, or perhaps encouraged to do something about it. Social media is a huge part of this generation, which is why college kids were the point of focus. We now know the extent to which we are impacted by it in terms of self-image, diet and fitness.